



Evaluation Report

Pilot Nutrition Program Within Recreational Summer Activity

**This Research was conducted by Tovanot Institute
for the Development and Evaluation Department**

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The Development and Evaluation Department, Rashi Foundation

The Development and Evaluation Department of the Rashi Foundation was established in 2006 as part of the Foundation's head office. Its purpose is to advance the Foundation's activity in "entrepreneurial philanthropy," which emphasizes rationalized decision-making processes based on data and outcome considerations.

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The Department is responsible for initiative development services, planning of innovative models and physical programs, assessment studies, and organizational learning - all of which enable the Foundation to initiate, promote and operate a variety of projects in areas of education, welfare and health.

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Executive summary

General

During the course of school year the Ministries of Education and Welfare support nutrition projects which provide meals to thousands of children across Israel. The Rashi Foundation via the Association for Change in Education is responsible, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, for providing hot lunches to 175,000 students. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services provides funding for meals in after-school welfare programs.

During periods when the Education Ministry and some of the welfare services are on vacation, many children do not regularly receive a nutritious meal. As a result of this, it is estimated that these children suffer from Food Insecurity.

Based on this assumption, it was decided in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services, in conjunction with the national project for children and youth at risk and the Rashi Foundation, to develop a program that would provide breakfast and lunch for children at risk during the month of August. The program was set up as a pilot project and its objective was to systematically examine the need for establishing a law for "provision of meals to children at risk" during vacations in the welfare and education systems.

The program took off in August 2011 with the participation of 1,620 children and 23 local authorities from all around the country. Most of the participants visit after-school programs on regular basis and are known to the social services at their municipal authority. In order to avoid stigmatizing the participants as "needy", it was decided that the food component would be incorporated in a framework similar to a summer camp where the children would participate in experiential activities.

According to a decision made by the program's steering committee and following the request of the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Services Mr. Moshe Kachlon, it was decided to accompany the pilot with a formative evaluation whose objectives are:

- To provide decision makers with early indications regarding the effectiveness of the program.
- To provide information to the operators and planners of the program that will assist them in improving operation of the program in the future.

Main findings

1. The program provided a response to a real need of children at risk in the communities where it operated. There were indications that a significant portion of the program participants suffer from Food Insecurity in a moderate or high level. Many of them do not have adult supervision during the summer months and consequently are exposed to risk situations. Other indications of the need for the program were manifested by the high demand for the program by the local authorities.
2. The target population determined for the program was found to correspond to the population that benefited from the program in practice. A majority of the participants took part in after-school programs recognized by the welfare services, a quarter of the children were from single-parent families and/or families where at least one of the parents was not employed and a majority of participating families reported a gross income of less than 6,000 shekels a month.
3. The level of satisfaction of the participants and their parents with the program was very high. Parents of the participants reported that their children enjoyed the program, which fulfilled their expectations.
4. Reports by the parents, counseling staff and welfare representatives indicate that participation in the program indirectly contributed to decreasing exposure to risk situations and to the parents' feeling that their children were in a safe place.
5. Reports by representatives of the local authorities in which the program operated indicate that the program contributed to the positive public perception of the authorities, as capable of providing responses to the public even during recesses.
6. The program began operation at very short notice - just three weeks. This fact affected three central aspects of the program:
 - a. Local authorities that were in need of the program were not able to participate due to lack of time for the necessary arrangements as well the need to obtain permits for operation of the program.
 - b. The municipal authorities that did participate did so under considerable time pressure, which made preparation for the program difficult in the following aspects: recruitment of experienced staff, location and placement of children suitable for the program, and planning diverse high quality activities.
 - c. The widespread feeling among the authorities that participated in the program was that it appeared suddenly "out of the blue" without any preliminary notice.
7. The NIS 800 budget of the program was not sufficient to cover expenses such as: security,

photocopying, materials for crafts, transportation, etc. The budget allowed primarily (but not exclusively) for activity based upon the work of the staff with the children in the framework of the program, and less for enjoyable activities outside the program framework.

8. A high level of satisfaction was expressed regarding the quality of the food provided to the participants. However, according to staff reports in some of the groups, breakfast, which for logistical reasons was provided by the bodies that administered the groups, was not sufficiently balanced. Some of the staff members reported that they were not taken into account in the allocation of food. It was additionally reported that lunch was less suited to the tastes of the children from the Arab and Druze sectors. In some cases it was not logistically possible to provide food for activities outside of the program framework, which sometimes made it difficult to hold activities.
9. Some of the staff reported that it was difficult to control the children during the activities, due to behavioral and disciplinary problems, that usually characterize children at risk.
10. The average attendance in the program was 85%. In a small number of the local authorities during the first two or three days of the program attendance was low, but then stabilized at a reasonable level. In a few of the authorities attendance was low for the duration of the program.

Primary Recommendations

In light of the above findings regarding the need for the program and its contribution to the participants and their parents, the recommendation is to continue the program in its present form and even to expand it. However, a number of changes in the manner of preparation and administration are recommended:

Preparation for the program

1. The local authorities should be given preliminary notice of at least two to three months regarding operation of the program, which will allow better organization and preparation in all respects.
2. In order to improve the efficiency in organization and production of the program, a forum of representatives of all the entities involved in organization and operation of the program should be convened in each of the authorities prior to operation of the program. Coordination of expectations, presentation of the program and its objectives, and decisions upon division of responsibility among the entities should be determined in these forums.

3. Kits containing the paperwork and permits required for operation of the program should be produced and sent to the local authorities concurrently with the notice on the upcoming operation of the program.

Implementation of the program

4. The recommendation is that the mandate for planning the program be left to the local authority, but guidelines and standards for planning and operation should be defined. These guidelines can relate to the following: content of activity, counselors' profiles, equipment, the type of building in which the activity can be held, the amount of indoors/ outdoors activity, the amount of different types of activity (enrichment/amusement/ crafts), etc.
5. After-school clubs should continue to be the preferred venue for the program. Where possible the program should not be held in schools or other venues which cannot easily provide the physical conditions necessary for the activity.
6. The recommendation is to allow the local authorities to decide upon the dates on which to hold the activity as long as they don't affect the children's eligibility for participation in other summer activities offered by the local authorities. The program should be supplemental and not come at the expense of other activities designated for children at risk.

Location and classification of participants

7. It is recommended that the number of children allowed to participate in the program be increased, and to allow all of the children in after-school clubs to participate. Perhaps the quota should even be increased to include additional children who aren't in the after-school clubs.
8. Children should be located and placed in the program in a more accurate way, with priorities determined according to better clarified criteria, including the degree of risk to the children.

Meals

9. The recommendation is to continue to provide breakfast via the local staff. However, in order ensure the high quality of the food, a weekly menu that is nutritiously balanced should be arranged in advance.
10. It is recommended to allow the different groups to eat lunch outside the program framework in certain situations, such as at the pool or during trips, as long as proper hygienic conditions, which have been approved in advance by the Association for Change in Education, are maintained.

Staff

11. The recommendation is to recruit as mature and experienced staff members as possible and to continue to recruit counselors who worked as children's counselors during the summer. Clear criteria for recruiting staff members should be defined regarding age, experience and skills.
12. Clear criteria should be defined for the position of activity coordinator including the obligation to be present during all hours of activity, and expectations should be thoroughly coordinated in advance.
13. Staff members should receive compulsory instruction on subjects such as handling violence, sensitivities of the population, expectations, etc.
14. It is recommended that an additional (third) counselor be added to groups with disciplinary problems, or where the counseling staff is relatively young.
15. Additional counselors should join the staff when groups travel outside the community for a trip or supplemental activity.

Work with parents

16. Cooperation with the parents in the activities should be heightened as part of the approach of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services towards community cooperation. For example, parents could serve as escorts for activities outside the regular venue.
17. As part of the policy of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services the main ideas emphasized by the summer program should reinforce the work of the social worker who supervises the activity, further raising awareness among the children's parents to wider issues that affect and characterize the pilot program's target population (such as parental responsibility).

Budget

18. It is recommended that the budget for the activity be increased from NIS 800 to NIS 1,000 - 1,100 per child and that the following methods for raising additional funds should be included:
 - a. Commitment of the local authorities to provide matching funding of NIS 100 - 250 per child.
 - b. Collection of payment NIS 50-100 per child from parents as proof of intent